




**Optometric
Business
Innovators**
 2012

PRESENTED BY REVIEW OF OPTOMETRIC BUSINESS AND VISION MONDAY

TOP DOCS

In Practice Management

Lessons Learned From Optometry's Innovators

The profession of optometry seems to foster innovation. Perhaps because it is a field that's constantly in flux, its practitioners are always being challenged to come up with new ways to solve problems.

Faced with the sluggish economy, a changing regulatory climate, shifting patient expectations and new forms of competition, today's optometrists are getting more creative in their approach to both clinical and business matters. Whether it's improving their diagnostic skills, implementing new technologies in the exam room or office, employing the latest management techniques or raising the level of patient care, forward-thinking ODs are pushing ahead with fresh ideas. They

are the focus of our second annual Optometric Business Innovators report, a special collaborative project between *Vision Monday* and *Review of Optometric Business*.

With help from our Professional Advisory panel, which is comprised of ODs from the private and corporate arenas and professional OD business consultants—plus input from our readers—we once again selected some of the best and brightest talents in the profession. We got this diverse group of men and women to tell us the secrets of their success in Marketing, Digital Media, Business Management, Optical Dispensing, Contact Lens Dispensing and The Patient Experience. We also identified a select group of Influencers who have

taken lessons and ideas from their own practices and translated their business-savvy ideas into larger groups, organizations and projects which influence many optometrists.

Whether you're a recent optometry school graduate or a veteran OD with years of experience, you're sure to find the profiles of our Optometric Business Innovators to be interesting and informative. Together, they paint a picture of a dynamic profession that is growing and evolving. ■

—The Editors of *VM* and

Review of Optometric Business:

Marge Axelrad, Deirdre Carroll, Mary Kane,
Andrew Karp, Roger Mummert, John Sailer,
Margery Weinstein, Catherine Wolinski

The Selection Process for the 2012 Innovators

Vision Monday and *Review of Optometric Business* worked with a Professional Advisory Panel, composed of various experts in the arenas of practice management and optometric consulting. The Professional Advisory Panel submitted nominations of practitioners they felt were noteworthy innovators in the following areas: Marketing, Digital Media, Business Management, Optical Dispensing, The Patient Experience, Influencers and Contact Lens Dispensing.

Among those on the 2012 Optometric Business Innovator Professional Advisory Panel:

- **Gary Gerber, OD**, optometric business consultant, The Power Practice
- **Rupe Hansra, OD**, LensCrafters, Sr. Director Eye Care Central Group
- **Mark Wright, OD, FCOVD**, founder of Pathways to Success; Professional Editor, *Review of Optometric Business*; and faculty member of the Management & Business Academy (MBA).

- **Neil Draisin, OD, FCOVD**, founder and CEO of The Draisin Vision Group, past president of SECO. *VisionMonday* and *Review of Optometric Business* also solicited, separately, input from their readers via **VMail** and direct e-mail, for innovative ODs in the same categories. Those submissions, along with the recommendations of the Professional Advisory Panel, were considered by the editorial teams of *VM* and *ROB* to determine the final 2012 selections. ■



“It’s having the confidence to go off track to explore new concepts that separates you from anyone else.”



STEVEN CHANDER, OD
CLINICAL DIRECTOR
PRIMARY EYE CARE ASSOCIATES
WWW.WEHELPCHICAGOSEE.COM
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

During the recent economic downturn, Steven Chander, OD, was able to use creative promotions to continue providing preventative care for his patients while also keeping his appointment book filled. “We started offering CareCredit to every patient, no matter how big or how small their transaction was, including those coming for an exam only,” he said. “We encouraged patients to return for their examinations even if they lost their job and benefits.” The same technique was used to maintain previous levels of contact lens sales. “Yearly supplies of contacts were made even easier during the sluggish recovery of the economy by use of the same concept—attain rebates and yearly supply savings and pay for them over six months interest free,” Chander said.

Keeping the patient informed, both during the office visit as well as after, is another way that Chander promotes his practice. “We are paperless and offer in-exam-room digital imaging and video to show patients the function of their symptoms or

pathology that may exist,” he said. “All patients are either texted or e-mailed the day after their visit thanking them again for choosing us and directing them to a website to further enhance our services for members of their family and their friends. Our patients enjoy beverages and movies during their visit and are kept up to date with our Facebook and Yelp updates.”

Chander pays particularly close attention to first impressions, making sure that new patients are treated especially well. “We offer a free gift to every new patient when they have completed their time with the technician,” he said. “I always find a pleasant patient with a grand smile on their face holding their gift in their lap as I walk in to introduce myself... even if I’m slightly behind.”

This attention ultimately pays off. “Because of the gift, patients are less apt to take their Rx to go,” Chander added. “Even if they had been inclined to take their Rx to an online service or to a big box frame store, they will stop in our optical, almost feeling obligated to do so.”

DARBY CHIASSON, OD

OWNER

ADVANCED EYE INSTITUTE
WWW.VISIONSOURCE-DRDARBYCHIASSON.COM
CUT OFF, LOUISIANA

“I have always believed in striving to provide superior service to my patients and community,” said Darby Chiasson, OD. “With that in mind, I have been involved in local, regional and state associations that have helped me understand the importance of the business of optometry and service of optometry to my community.”

A 1999 graduate of the Southern College of Optometry, Chiasson opened a practice with Quentin Falgoust, MD, in Cut Off that same year and in 2003 bought the practice from him. Being solely

“The biggest upside is more bang for our buck marketing directly to the patient.”



responsible for the practice (and having recently moved into a brand new building) meant that there was no time for slow business so Chiasson opened a finishing lab in the office. The lab, called South Lafourche Optical Lab, handles all the work for Chiasson’s office, as well as for Falgoust’s other offices. It also meant he needed to become savvier with his marketing efforts.

“Marketing my practice changed from mostly paper/yellow pages to digital,” he explained. “We have used more social media and direct electronic marketing in the last two years. Participating in events throughout my community and region along with follow-up marketing has kept our office in the minds of the area. We love being an integral part of many community projects and marketing one-on-one has set us apart. The biggest upside is more bang for our buck marketing directly to the patient.”

RICHARD J. SHULDINER, OD, FAAO

OWNER

LOW VISION OPTOMETRY
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
WWW.LOWVISIONCARE.COM
CORONA, CALIFORNIA

Low vision has always been a high priority for Richard Shuldiner, OD. In the 1970s, as a young

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“All of my interactions with patients, colleagues and vendors are guided by the philosophy of win/win.”



optometrist in upstate New York, Shuldiner was looking for ways to distinguish his private practice. After hearing a Lions Club speaker talk about low vision, he contacted the New York Lighthouse, which helped him get established in the field and later appointed him clinical director of low vision services for Westchester County.

Working with pioneering low vision specialist William Feinbloom, OD enabled Shuldiner to develop a deeper understanding of low vision issues and treatment options. Together, they created an innovative training program for optometrists, “Philosophy & Methods of Providing Low Vision Care,” that has helped thousands of patients.

“I developed a model,” Shuldiner explained. “The first part is a patient telephone interview. I want to make sure that when that patient is in my chair, they know what to expect and whether we can meet their goals. Then there’s a 12-point evaluation

that covers all the patient’s needs. We believe in life after vision loss and hands-free magnification.”

Shuldiner founded an organization, The International Academy of Low Vision Specialists, to train and coach members in semi-annual meetings, monthly conference calls and one-on-one conversations. Members are required to come to Shuldiner’s San Diego, Calif. office for a week of personal, hands-on training. “I’ve trained about 40 doctors in the last 10 years,” he proudly noted.

Additionally, Shuldiner owns Vision Vitamins Inc., a company that makes OTC drugs to slow or stop the progression of macular degeneration. He also operates Vision Improvement Services, which trains occupational therapists to teach people with central vision loss how to compensate with their peripheral vision.

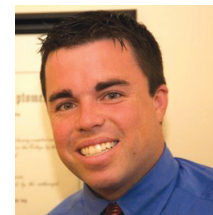
RYAN C. WINEINGER, OD

CO-OWNER

WINEINGER EYECARE
WWW.EYESOFKC.COM
SHAWNEE, KANSAS

“Business as usual” isn’t an option at Wineinger Eyecare, Ryan C. Wineinger, OD, pointed out. The doctor, who joined the practice 10 years ago which his father Roger C. Wineinger, OD, founded 35 years ago, said the practice prides itself on staying on the optometric cutting edge. “We were one of the first optometric practices in the country to apply for, and receive, stimulus money for the electronic health records incentive program,” Wineinger said. Another

“By personalizing our patients’ care, we create a high level of satisfaction which increases our patients’ trust, and in turn, their loyalty.”



key advancement: the addition of digital refracting machines. “This helps to increase our efficiencies, which reduces the amount of time patients spend waiting in our office.”

The practice adeptly uses technology to market its products and services. “We recently started aggressive social media campaigns, and almost all of our communications going to patients now are in electronic format such as e-mail and text messaging,” Wineinger said.

The practice also recently started offering monthly promotions either via a social media website or in the office directing patients toward its social media sites. These promotions typically involve a free monthly giveaway such as a pair of sunglasses, contact lenses and gift cards, in addition to product discounts. “Patients enjoy the game aspect of our promotions “and we’ve seen that as a way of personalizing their care while also increasing our brand awareness,” he said.

DESCRIPTION

Consumers who want to have their eyes examined or buy a new pair of glasses or contact lenses have more options than ever before. Independent eyecare practices, local, regional and national retail chains, mass merchants and, most recently, virtual online dispensaries are all vying for consumers’ attention. In this hotly competitive marketplace, optometrists who have mastered the marketing techniques used by other service-oriented business have a clear advantage. The optometric innovators profiled in this section show how these true optical marketing mavens have put their own spins on these techniques.

“We continue to grow because we are willing to seek out new ways to attract, educate and retain patients.”



SCOTT D. POUYAT, OD
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT
LAKE ZURICH EYECARE
WWW.LAKEZURICHEYECARE.COM
LAKE ZURICH, ILLINOIS

With 10 optometric practices within a three mile radius of the Lake Zurich EyeCare office, it was important to figure out a way to stand out. “I was able to set Lake Zurich EyeCare and other practices apart from the competition by introducing the EyeDocApp,” said Scott D. Pouyat, OD.

The EyeDocApp (www.eyedocapp.com), which Pouyat developed, is a customizable mobile application designed for optometrists and used by their patients. “The ability to have a smartphone app for my practice has helped me retain, educate and attract new patients,” he stated. “EyeDocApp

integrates with Facebook, Twitter and e-mail allowing patients to spread the word about our practice, technology, services and staff without us having to do anything.”

The app, which can be downloaded via a QR code on all of the office’s communications, also allows patients to request appointments, order contact lenses, get directions and access an eye Wikipedia, as well as view videos, promotions and news articles. The EyeDocApp now also offers PUSH Technology so patients can receive instant messages about new promotions.

“Our practice is only seven years old and we have been growing consistently ever year,” Pouyat added. “EyeDocApp has helped us shorten the time between patient visits and increase per patient revenue.”

ROBERT SOLTYS, OD

PRESIDENT/CEO
BARTON CREEK EYECARE
WWW.BARTONCREEKEYECARE.COM
AUSTIN, TEXAS
BRAZOS VALLEY EYECARE
COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

We are as diligent in our digital media approach as we are with patient care, always seeking out new ideas and constantly striving to deliver the best experience possible,” said Robert

“We believe that complacency is the enemy of success.”



Soltys, OD. “Despite the recent lulls in the economy, we have been fortunate enough to maintain a steady increase in patient growth. Having primarily achieved this growth due to our digital marketing plan, we felt it best to concentrate more of our budget into our digital approach.”

Digital media has been a huge help in marketing the six year-old practice. “Digital media is an amazing form of communication which allows you to interact with your target audience on a social level to create a personal relationship which traditional media doesn’t do,” he added. “In this day and age patients, especially those in large metropolitan areas, expect the latest technology.”

Though he admits that getting his staff to embrace the new ideas and technology his patients expect can be a challenge. “Often

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because they assume it will increase their own work load,” Soltys explained. “Therefore, it is crucial to train your staff on how to properly utilize the technology and educate them on how these new ideas and programs will actually increase the efficiency of your office and create a better patient experience.”

Soltys does this by keeping his staff updated weekly on the practice’s digital media plans and what he hopes to achieve with them. “The staff is always full of great questions and feedback that often causes us to alter our approach. We also get them involved when creating reward systems for compliance and recognize them for outstanding customer service.

“We find the more you allow your staff to get involved in developing your approach the more likely they are to follow through with it,” he concluded.

“Our commitment is not just in meeting [patients’] expectations, but in exceeding them.”



DONALD BOYD, OD

OWNER

DONALD W. BOYD, OPTOMETRY
WWW.DRDONALDWBOYD.COM
DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA

“We believe Dr. Boyd is a key influencer to his optometric colleagues because he has embraced the online space in a way that supports his patients and his private practice,” said his nominator. “He’s helped beta test and then launch his practice’s very own eStore, which is an online extension of his practice’s brick-and-mortar dispensary.

“He’s helping demonstrate that private practice can compete online and offer this innovative option to let his patients shop online whenever they want to for contact lenses, prescription eyewear and sunwear that can be delivered right to the patient’s front door. He’s helping lead the way and showing by example how optometric practices can be successful in this emerging and fast growing space.”

Editor’s Note: Donald W. Boyd, OD, was unable to participate more fully in his profile at press time as he was out of the office for health reasons. He hopes to return to his office in the next few weeks.

DESCRIPTION

The rapidly developing realm of digital media is creating exciting new ways for optometrists and patients to interact and exchange information. Blogs, online review services, websites, virtual dispensaries, social media and Twitter all play a role in the ongoing dialogue not only on a doctor-to-patient or patient-to-doctor level, but on a patient-to-patient level and on a doctor-to-doctor level as well. A growing number of optometrists are venturing into this new arena, and many are simply learning by trial and error. But a few practitioners have already developed considerable skills. These “digital docs” have devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to mastering the new media, and have a lot to say about what works and what doesn’t. They are sharing their experiences in their own blogs and Tweets, and are gaining reputations as the “go to” experts in the optical online community. The Optical Business Innovators in this section offer valuable insights to anyone who is interested in learning more about how to use digital media effectively and integrate it into their practice’s marketing plan.



“One can never become complacent in these competitive times. You always have to re-invent yourself as the highway to success is always under construction.”



JAMES AVERSA, OD, PA

OWNER

T/A HEIGHTS EYE CENTER
WWW.HEIGHTSEYECENTER.NET
HASBROUCK HEIGHTS, NEW JERSEY

After five years of working in various group eyecare practices, James Aversa, OD took the plunge and went into private practice in 1990. Looking back on the decision Aversa said, “there were limitations to working in a group practice and I wanted to control my own destiny.”

Certified in both topical and oral pharmaceuticals as well as Paragon CRT ortho-keratology, today Heights Eye Center concentrates on primary care with a focus on the diagnoses and management of eye disease. “I have invested in the necessary instrumentation to properly diagnose and treat eye disease. The latest instrument acquisition is an OCT which has been an invaluable benefit to the practice. The management of eye disease such as dry eye, glaucoma and macular degeneration has kept the patient volume consistent and is quite rewarding,” he said.

Aversa admits that keeping up with new technology and new instruments “is a win/win for me and the patients. The OCT checks for glaucoma and while it’s an expensive piece of equipment it’s a great investment because it’s such a good diagnostic tool.” Another key to the practice’s long-term success has been the ability to stay on top of the technology, e.g.

Ortho K and specialty lenses, and “embrace new things like primary care vision therapy, which has helped me stay focused and stretch beyond my comfort zone. That’s how you progress, by taking a chance and seeing what works,” he added.

However, Aversa believes “the most important piece of equipment I have is my staff. We have been working on the flow of the patient experience, from the time they enter to when they leave. I would like to think that we offer patient centric personalized service which is better than our counterparts. We want them to have a ‘wow’ experience and hopefully they will refer other people.”

“I strive to put in the necessary effort to demonstrate genuine generosity, with the assumption that if my efforts are properly directed and energized, business success will result.”



SCOTT JENS, OD, FFAO

CO-OWNER & PARTNER

ISTHMUS EYECARE
WWW.ISTMUSEYE.COM
MIDDLETON, WISCONSIN

The economic downturn created an opportunity for Isthmus Eye Care, according to its co-owner and partner Scott Jens, OD, FFAO. “The downturn impacted the discretionary purchases that patients were readily making before, such as lasik and second-pair purchases,” said Jens. With that in mind, Jens used his practice as the “launching pad” for his RevolutionEHR cloud-based software system “which allowed us to cost-effectively manage patient records,

prescriptions, and patient qualifications and candidacy for needs-based purchases. This allowed us to focus on helping patients to get their desires met, while helping the practice to maintain growth.” Momentum also is kept by focusing on key practice indicators and using outside consultancies like ODLean to assure smooth patient care and staff workflow. The practice also participates in customer service workshops and is preparing to undergo a “practice blueprint-for-the-future project” with consultancy LeadershipOD.

Isthmus Eye Care has developed a robust Product Sales department, both optical and contact lens, while driving a strong medical practice. “We place one technician between the post-exam and optical to provide better verbal handoffs to complement the information transfer capabilities of RevolutionEHR, and to share key patient information,” Jens said.

“A famous quote from legendary Ohio State football coach Woody Hayes summarizes my management style: ‘You win with people.’”



GEORGE D. POULOS, OD

LENSCRAFTERS SUBLEASING OPTOMETRIST

SOUTH PARK EYE ASSOCIATES,
STRONGSVILLE, OHIO
GREAT NORTHERN EYE ASSOCIATES,
NORTH OLMSTED, OHIO
TUTTLE EYE ASSOCIATES, DUBLIN, OHIO
WWW.SOUTHPARKEYE.COM
WWW.GREATNORTHERNEYE.COM
WWW.TUTTLEEYE.COM

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A sense of loyalty and attention to the patient experience are two cornerstones that have sustained the long-term association George Poulos, OD has had with LensCrafters beginning in 1988 when he worked as a technician in a LensCrafters while completing his undergraduate education. Since 1996, he has been a LensCrafters subleasing doctor and subsequently added locations in the Cleveland and Columbus areas. Today, Poulos admits he enjoys the mix of seeing patients and managing the operations of the three Ohio-based practices.

“The biggest management challenge when you have multiple locations, is hiring a staff that can deliver a consistent patient experience every day. As leaders in our offices, we must provide an uncompromising vision and hire the right talent to carry out that vision. In addition, I have established leadership expectations for my office managers and associate doctors which creates a culture of accountability.”

Poulos admits that the guiding principle of the practices is centered around accommodating the needs of the patients, and providing convenient appointment availability for all three locations which are open seven days a week. “To make this happen, we must hire selfless people, develop them, and create a culture in the office that is focused on accommodating the needs of our patients. This leads to retention and referrals, which in turn leads to sustained growth.”

The addition of retinal digital imaging six years ago has made a huge improvement in the patient experience allowing the associates to explain their

findings and relate eye health to general health issues, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, according to Poulos. “The ability to connect with our patients on a personal level and stay connected over time is the biggest reason we have experienced growth, despite the economic challenges in our area.”

“Our motto is ‘Advanced Vision Care You Can Trust.’ To us this means providing cutting edge technology in a modern, clean and friendly office.”



BARRY TANNEN, OD PRESIDENT

EYECARE PROFESSIONALS, PC
WWW.EYECAREPROFESSIONALS.COM
HAMILTON SQUARE, NEW JERSEY

As an associate clinical professor of optometry at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Optometry, Barry Tannen, OD knows a thing or two about practice management. Tannen encourages his students to avoid the trap of thinking just because they’re ODs, doesn’t mean they can’t have business intelligence as well.

In addition to his one day a week duties at SUNY, he lectures nationally and internationally on learning related vision disorders, strabismus, amblyopia and vision therapy. He has written and co-authored over 30 peer-reviewed optometric publications, including the 1995 book *Eye Movement Basics for the Clinician*. He is president of EyeCare Professionals, P.C., a private group practice in Hamilton Square, N.J., which he co-founded with Dr. Nicholas Despotidis in 1988. Tannen is also on the faculty at the Southern College of Optometry where he is the program supervisor for the Vision Therapy and Rehabilitation Private Practice Residency at EyeCare Professionals, PC.

The sluggish economic recovery has spurred Tannen and his partners, including Ivan Lee, OD, to shift gears. “For us it’s been a matter of re-evaluating the value of our services, products and care. I’ve always been a strong believer that you should be able to say, “If I were a patient, would I come to this office and would I continue to come?” The practice is also receiving \$44,000 in stimulus money as part of the electronic health records incentive program known as the American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

“We emphasize the optometric specialty areas which tend to be perceived as ‘high barrier to entry’ specialties. For us this includes vision therapy, corneal reshaping (and other specialty contact lens fits) and traumatic brain injury. The expertise and management skills required to be successful in these optometric specialty areas allow us to charge commensurate fees.”

DESCRIPTION

Managing an optometric practice profitably requires an entirely different set of skills than being a capable clinician. Yet to develop and maintain a successful practice, a practitioner must be handy with both a flow chart and a Snellen chart. Our Optical Business Innovators know what a tricky balancing act that can be. The challenges they face daily are the same as those faced by other optometrists. However, each of these optometrists has taken a discerning look at the market in which they compete and has taken steps to differentiate and grow their practice. As our Innovators attest, profit is not the only factor influencing their business decision. Often, the choice of whether to implement a certain program or product is determined by whether it will help their patients. Putting their patients’ interests first is what separates these business-savvy practitioners from the pack.



"I try to treat every patient as if they are doing me a favor by walking into my office, not that I am doing them a favor for providing their care."



MATTHEW ALPERT, OD

OWNER

ALPERT VISION CARE
WWW.EVERYTHINGEYES.COM
WOODLAND HILLS, CALIFORNIA

In practice and a member of the American Optometric Association and the California Optometric Association for 15 years, Matthew Alpert, OD, is past president of the San Fernando Valley Optometric Society and board member for over 10 years. He received the California Optometric Association Young Optometrist of the Year Award in 2005, and he is a 2012 member of the VSP Global board of directors.

In addition to attending to his busy practice, Alpert also writes about vision and eyewear issues for the Sheknows.com blog, reaching 38 million people in the U.S. and 55 million people globally.

What is the biggest challenge affecting his practice today? "Keeping up with technology and having the appropriate product mix," he said. "Investing in new disease identification and management technology is a must. It keeps the quality of care elevated and gives your patients a sense of comfort knowing they are receiving the highest level of care."

About his dispensary, he said, "The retail product mix is critical. I have found patients will leave your practice if you do not have what they are looking for. I disagree with the current theories of board management. I feel you should have an abundance of choice and not worry as much about how many

times your frame boards turn. Losing patients because of poor selection has a trickle-down effect on the entire practice."

Finally, he views staff as integral to his practice's success. "I feel educating your staff and making them feel like they are part of the practice has many benefits," he said. "I take my entire staff to Vision Expo West so they can get excited about our industry and feel like they are a part of something big. A happy, productive and educated staff yields a profitable optometric practice."

"We distinguish ourselves by service. We want our staff to be friendly and personal in the service we provide."



BONNIE CHEN, OD

OWNER

VISION LOFT OPTOMETRY
WWW.THEVISIONLOFT.COM
CONCORD, NORTH CAROLINA

Bonnie Chen, OD, of The Vision Loft in Concord, N.C., has built her practice to grow. After years of working part time and raising children, she and her husband, an emergency room physician, built a free-standing building with room to expand. "One of the best pieces of advice I got from colleagues was allow yourself enough space so you never have to move," she explained.

Chen is expanding, now, from one exam lane to two (and eventually five), and she has taken on several associates, who also work part time. The dispensary has a staff of four, including an office manager and an optical manager. The building is located across from Concord Mills, a 200-store outlet mall

that draws shoppers from nearby Charlotte and throughout the region. "We have so many people driving right past us every day, and they see my big sign, which is my best marketing tool," Chen said.

If her sign brings in patients, her distinctive 1,000-square-foot optical dispensary, combined with friendly service and expert care, keeps them there. Chen chose a local design team—one with no experience in optical but heavily steeped in retail design—to create a dispensary that was unlike that of competitors. She showed them brochures from optical dispensary manufacturers, but in the end they used their own ideas and local craftsmen to fabricate a unique look.

Her dispensary design combines curves and straight-edged displays, as well as contrasting fabrics and woods and thoughtful merchandising and lighting that sets off high-end lines like Lafont and Tom Ford, two of her best-sellers. She also placed a fish tank with brilliantly colored tropical fish as a separation from the dispensary and lab, and also created a "spa area" where patients rest in comfortable chairs while being dilated or awaiting exams.

"It is my responsibility to bring you the latest and greatest technology every year. If I ever stop bringing you the best, then you should go somewhere else for your eyecare."



JEREMY CIANO, OD

OWNER

REVOLUTION EYES
WWW.REVOLUTION-EYES.COM
CARMEL, INDIANA

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Jeremy Ciano, OD, established his own practice over four years ago taking the hard stance of doing what's best for his patients all the time. For example, he offers no CR-39 lenses because they have no inherent UV protection. Every pair of glasses he sells comes standard with anti-glare, and all of his progressives are digitally surfaced.

"We had to make that stand and let some people who want a lesser quality medical product walk out the door," he said. "It's tough when you're starting up a new practice, especially during a recession, but we've been growing by 15 percent to 20 percent every year."

In addition, the dispensary is commission free with the goal of making it a relaxed and fun shopping experience. Ciano said that working for a big box chain for more than five years prior to opening his own practice taught him "what not to do in retail."

"The complaints I heard were about how pushy salespeople were," he said. "When people notice that they are being educated and not sold to, they are more open to listen to your suggestions because they're coming from a medical perspective rather than from a sales standpoint."

His attention to his patients' needs was also evidenced by promotions he offered during the recent economic downturn. He noticed that while moms were making sure their kids still got their annual exams they were skipping their own, so he offered to examine them for free when they brought their children to the office. "We were there as a community provider, and that goodwill went a long, long way," he said.

Ciano is similarly attentive to his staff. "Without them I am nothing," he said about his employees, some of whom have been working with him since his previous position. "We close down our office every quarter to have a team building and customer

service event. Customer service is something that I am fanatical about. I hire on character and not on their skills set because I can train skills...but I can't train a smile."

"I am here to keep you seeing for the rest of your life."



MAUREEN FAHEY, OD

OWNER

DESERT VALLEY EYE CARE
WWW.DESERTVALLEYEYECARE.COM
KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

A video greeting from Maureen Fahey, OD is the first thing people see when they visit Desert Valley Eye Care's website, www.desertvalleyeyecare.com. That 30-second clip lets patients know she is friendly, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about providing them with a broad selection of distinctive, fashionable eyewear, something her family practice, and she herself, are known for. In fact, the site features a display of stylish frames that Fahey has worn over the years.

Fahey's communication skills are also evident in the way she educates patients about their eye health. "It's important for patients to know in simple terms what's going on," she said. "I make sure they know what they're doing if they need to follow any type of care regimen."

Following a consultation with The Williams

Group, Fahey heightened her focus on customer service, enabling her to extend a personal touch into all areas of the practice. "For example, when patients call for an appointment, my staff tells them the doctor has 'reserved' their time," she said. Simple but effective changes like this have boosted the practice's already high referral rate.

Fahey and her staff are excited about moving next month into a new 4,200 square foot office space that is being built to her specifications. The new facility will include a 900-square foot dispensary and reception area, and will feature drop down tin ceilings, chandeliers and floor to ceiling windows. "We want our patients to feel welcome, so they can have fun shopping around and finding a frame that's perfect for them," she said.

"Empower your people." And: "I plan to work myself out of a job and have fun doing it!"



ELAINE HAPP, OD

PRESIDENT

UPTOWN EYE CARE
WWW.UPTOWNEYECARE.COM
MONTICELLO, MINNESOTA

For Elaine Happ, OD, of Uptown Eye Care in Monticello, Minn., the operative word is growth. The 22-year-old practice expanded office space in 2005, going from 1,500 square feet to 5,000

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“Patients are not just a pair of eyes. You need to look at them as whole people.”



MICHAEL J. DUNN, OD

OWNER

THE FAMILY VISION CENTER
WWW.DRDUNNFAMILYVISION.COM
LUBBOCK, TEXAS

After several decades of building up a successful optometric practice, Michael J. Dunn, OD, found that the pathway to personal success lay in a rededication to the “roots of optometry.” In his practice, The Family Vision Center, in Lubbock, Texas, he concentrates on providing primary eyecare to families, as well as low vision therapy, vision training and nutritional counseling—and not selling eyewear.

In order to focus on these fundamentals of the profession, Dunn dramatically downsized a practice that had grown to employ 17 and which maintained files on 30,000 patients. He closed his dispensary, allowing him also to dispense with staff and its management challenges. Now he sees about 2,000 patients a year with a staff of just two: he and his wife, Cindy, an optician by background who also is trained in T'ai Chi Chih, a form of movement and a healing art similar to the martial art, T'ai Chi.

“The key difference is that I now spend at least a half-hour to 45 minutes with each patient,” said Dunn, who entered practice in 1976 after graduat-

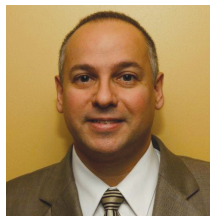
ing the University of Houston School of Optometry. He feels his approach, which builds for stronger doctor-patient bonds, suits both new and established practices.

Many of Dunn’s active patients are seniors, and he offers treatment services for macular degeneration and low vision. Dunn is enthusiastic about the success he has had in two other areas: corneal refractive therapy (CRT) and nutritional counseling. Paragon Optical named him CRT Practitioner of the Year in 2008, and he cites many instances of patients eliminating up to 6.0D of myopia with overnight use of reverse geometry rigid contact lenses.

If one thing differentiates Dunn’s practice, in this town of 230,000 with a concentration of medical centers, it is the patient experience which is notably more personal and satisfying with his holistic approach.

“I try to understand my patient’s total health history and recommend lifestyle changes and nutrients to support their needs,” said Dunn.

“If you do your best every day and give the patient the best exam they’ve ever had, you’ll have never to worry about patient flow.”



VINCE GRANIERO, OD

INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER

HENRIETTA, NEW YORK

Private practice optometrists and optical retail chains are usually competitors, but not so for Vince Graniero, OD. For more than 20 years, he has operated a successful, high-volume practice within a LensCrafters store in Henrietta, a suburb of Rochester, New York.

“We have a sublease within LensCrafters, so we’re private within a corporate setting,” he explained.

“It a huge benefit because LensCrafters is a well-known name. Thirty five percent of our patient base on a daily basis is walk-in traffic. When they’re shopping and in need of an eye exam, we can see them the same day. That generates lot of new patients.”

Graniero said that maximizing efficiency has been a key to the success of his practice. His team of three full-time optometrists, including himself, and two part-time ODs see patients seven days a week. He also employs a full support staff to handle pre-testing and check patients’ insurance.

The practice, which has been computerized since 2008, recently began using My Vision Express practice management software. The software allows patients to make appointments online, and then sends them reminders by e-mail and phone. It even enables Graniero to book appointments during an eye exam.

Advanced technology such as an Optos retinal scanner also plays an important role.

“We capture about 65 percent to 75 percent of our patients with the Optos,” said Graniero. “That’s huge in itself, and it generates a lot of referrals. We were the first practice in Rochester to use it.”

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“Recognize what patients and clients need and desire, then establish programs that exceed their expectations and success will follow.”



JOHN LAHR, OD, FFAO
MEDICAL DIRECTOR
EYEMED VISION CARE
WWW.EYEMEDVISIONCARE.COM
MASON, OHIO

While much of his experience with patients has resulted from his having founded a five-location primary eyecare group practice in Minnesota and managing it for 20 years, John Lahr, OD, now has an impact on far more patients as the medical director for EyeMed Vision Care. With approximately 159 million members, this vision benefits company provides access to thousands of private practice and retail-affiliated network providers.

As medical director of this massive organization, Lahr sees optometry’s role as being instrumental in health care reform and inherently involved with health risk assessment. He cited recent studies indicating increased incidence of diabetes and preva-

lence of cardiovascular disease risk factors among U.S. adolescents as illustrative of areas in which optometry can participate with other medical professionals in determining who is at risk and helping to monitor disease progression.

“Optical is in a unique position to be able to assess diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol,” he said. “Whatever we see in the eye is probably the same level of disease in the kidneys, liver and toes, for example.”

He described some steps that he and EyeMed are taking to participate in health risk assessment. “I sat in on several health coordination conferences where the employer brings all health care vendors to a meeting,” he said. “You have a medical carrier, dental carrier, you might have a psychology group, and you have vision, and we all discuss who is sharing information. Most of the time we’re the provider of unique data sets they haven’t seen before.” He sees this as only the beginning.

“Take the time to listen and respond to your patients and you will be rewarded.”



BRIAN SPITTLE, OD

PRESIDENT

THE EYE PLACE
WWW.THEEYEPPLACE.COM
MIDLOTHIAN, VIRGINIA

When trying to create a positive experience for patients, many optometrists redesign their office, purchase new, high tech equipment or employ the latest voice and text messaging services. Brian Spittle, OD takes a different approach.

“As odd as it may sound, we try to improve the patient experience by improving the employee experience,” said Spittle, who has grown his private practice in Midlothian, Va. more than seven times over since he bought it eight years ago. “Keeping staff morale high has allowed us to greet patients with a smile and resulted in a tremendous volume of referrals because enthusiasm is contagious.”

Focusing on customer service, communicating precisely to patients and providing quality care has been the key to growth of the practice, which Spittle co-owns with his wife, optometrist Dr. Norma Spittle. “The easiest way to be successful in business is to find a niche with minimal competition,” he said. “For us, that niche is a business based on honest communication.”

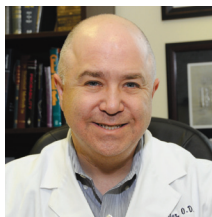
Spittle described his patient base as being “young, middle to upper class and somewhat trendy.” To appeal to this demographic, he has created an aesthetically designed office environment that features pleasant scents (a lavender-vanilla mix) and soft rock music. The entire facility is “green” as well, which many patients view as a plus.

DESCRIPTION

At one time, it was acceptable for patients to be greeted by a faceless voice behind a sliding glass door: “Have a seat and fill out these forms!” No longer. Optometrists operate in a highly competitive world, where patients—being smart consumers—have a host of reasons to go elsewhere to save a dollar or enjoy the convenience of purchasing what and when they prefer. This group of optometric innovators has leveraged their experience (and learned from other areas of retailing, commerce and medicine) that outstanding customer service is the key to success. These innovators have imparted to their entire staff the importance of delivering a consistently high level of customer service.



“Our Ritz-Carlton level customer service, internet marketing, ‘rock star’ docs and top-tier staff passionate about our practice sets us apart from the competition.”



ALAN GLAZIER, OD

FOUNDER/CEO

SHADY GROVE EYE AND VISION CARE
WWW.YOUREYESITE.COM
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Author, lecturer, inventor, businessman and he still finds time to see patients. Alan Glazier, OD, has become something of a renaissance man for modern optometry. Founder/CEO of a large private optometric practice, Glazier authored *Searchial Marketing: How Social Media Drives Search Optimization in Web 3.0* in 2011 and is a frequent lecturer on social and new media. He is the founder and moderator of the Social OD Network, which includes ODs on Facebook, an active social media discussion forum with over 2,000 industry professionals. As if that weren't enough, he holds four patents and nine pending patents in computer science and ophthalmology and is the founder/CEO of Vision Solutions Technologies, a medical device R&D company, which will bring a brand new intraocular lens, LiquiLens, to market.

But he isn't stopping there; he is currently in the process of expanding and modernizing his facilities. “In line with continuing to implement the medical model, we have been aggressively upgrading digital diagnostic technologies and adding new ones. We just became the third optometric practice in the world to get a LipiFlow Thermal Pulsation unit for treatment of evaporative dry eye,” said Glazier. “There has been a tremendous upside in both reve-

nue and our ability to provide top tier medical and refractive care as a result of our digital capabilities.”

All this growth isn't without its challenges. “The single biggest challenge has been to stay ahead of growth while continuing to provide the high level of customer service that patients are accustomed to receiving,” he concluded.

“Working with our doctors isn't a job, it's a relationship. Making sure they power their personal and professional dreams isn't a task, it's our purpose.”



GARY GERBER, OD

FOUNDER & OWNER

THE POWER PRACTICE
WWW.POWERPRACTICE.COM
FRANKLIN LAKES, NEW JERSEY

Gary Gerber, OD and his Power Practice consulting firm have been transforming optometric practices and the patient experience for the past 20 years. A champion of independent ODs, Gerber's firm has been a leader in practice management advising clients on everything from office efficiencies, customer service and staff motivation. After running his own successful practice in a highly competitive Northern N.J. area where he became a “student of business,” Gerber decided “he could show other ODs how it's done. Our doctors have talent and passion. The Power Practice shows them how to direct their energy and skills into practice success and the achievement of their dreams.”

Today, armed with a staff of 15 specializing in everything from billing and coding to social media and insurance, the consulting process consists of a

dedicated team tasked with analyzing the practice, formulating a program and developing different strategies based on the unique needs of each practice. The final analysis is followed by implementation, training and ultimately coaching. “We try to offer ODs better management and control making sure they achieve their professional and personal dreams.”

The firm identifies new opportunities to save money and generate additional revenue for practices. The approach is anything but cookie cutter and Gerber often looks to other industries and business sectors for inspiration and example. “One year we went up to Boston to meet with the head of housekeeping for the Ritz Carlton Hotel chain. We were able to get a whole new perspective on the strategy and technique of customer service.”

“We are extremely excited and optimistic for the future of optometry.”



DAVID GOLDEN, OD

OWNER

GOLDEN OPTOMETRIC GROUP
WWW.GOLDENOPTOMETRIC.COM
WEST COVINA, CALIFORNIA

While David Golden, OD, runs a busy practice started in 1959 by his father, Sheldon Golden, OD, much of his influence in the optometric field is due to his co-founding Professional Eyecare Resource Co-Operative (PERC) three years ago with Howard Stein, OD. He started PERC with the goal of helping organize independent optometrists and ophthalmologists to work together in order to stay competitive in the changing eyecare market.

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The organization helps procure products and provides resources for the development and management of offices grossing over \$1 million annually.

“Our mission is to educate and train the best managers in the eyecare world,” Golden said. “Almost 80 percent of our resources go to creating development programs for managers to build a great team.” PERC runs as a zero profit entity by returning all income that is earned by member purchases after administrative and educational expenses. PERC has built a Medical Eye Home Model that has delivered over 18,000 patients to its members and partner practices. Currently, PERC has 210 locations in 17 states.

Golden is also co-founder of the Aris Vision Institute, which operates 23 refractive surgery centers in the U.S., Mexico and Japan, and which is now part of Gimble Vision Canada.

His newest venture is EyeHome Network, a health care entity designed to improve Star Rating and HEDIS scores using the PERC network to coor-

dinate eyecare for large health plans. EyeHome uses optometry to deliver cost-effective, primary and secondary eyecare to covered individuals. The program has already delivered over 20,000 patients in Arizona and California, and in 2013, New York, Virginia and potentially three other states will be added.

Golden still finds time to manage Golden Optometric Group, where he’s been practicing for 25 years.

ELIOT GROSSMAN, OD

VICE PRESIDENT OF EYE CARE
LENSCRAFTERS, NORTH AMERICA
WWW.LENSCRAFTERS.COM
MISSION VIEJO, CALIFORNIA

After 27 years with LensCrafters, Eliot Grossman, OD, has had the “opportunity to work with many optometrists and patients to understand issues and discover new, innovative ways to deliver higher quality of care and a better eyecare experience,” he said.

“This profession is about people taking great care of people.”



Grossman’s history with LensCrafters began in 1985 when he started as an employee with a LensCrafters sublease doctor in Chicago. He was promoted to regional manager in 1989 when he became responsible for the 23 locations that LensCrafters then purchased from that doctor. He moved to California in 1997 to become executive director of Eye Exam of California. In 2008, he was promoted to VP, Eye Care, for LensCrafters, North America, responsible for both employed and sublease doctors throughout the U.S. and Canada.

His recent innovative and influential endeavors in the optical field include adding online appointment scheduling capabilities to the LensCrafters website as well as participating in the brand-wide launch of the Accufit system, which allows for five times more accurate fitting measurements and enables patients to choose between different frame styles while also better understanding the benefits of different lenses.

“This year, we implemented a new customer experience model,” added Grossman. “The essence of it speaks to making an emotional connection with the patient and customer, exploring all of their needs and wants and exceeding the expectations that they have of what their experience will be like.” LensCrafters trains its staff at all locations to more fully communicate during the exam experience what they are doing and why. “This was created out of the belief that patients want heightened communication and based on feedback from patients asking to understand what’s being done to them.”

Grossman also ensures that all LensCrafters associ-

ates are cross trained so they can take care of patients and customers throughout the entire experience.

ANN HOSCHEIT, OD, FAAO, FAARM OWNER

SUMMIT EYE ASSOCIATES
WWW.SUMMITEYE.NET
GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

Ann Hoscheit, OD wears many hats and depending on when and where you see her, you might meet a clinician, business owner, educator or researcher. In January 2013, she’ll record another milestone in her storied career as she celebrates the 10th anniversary of her second start-up practice, Summit Eye Associates, where her practice integrates personal service with the delivery of state-of-the art eyecare while offering several “centers of excellence.”

Her most recent venture was completing a fellowship in Integrative Medicine and incorporating a Wellness Center into the practice. Hoscheit was the first

“There are three types of people: those who make it happen, those who watch it happen and those who wonder what happened.”



optometrist in the country to receive formal training in functional medicine and is the first physician, from any background in Gaston County, to provide integrative medicine in their practice. “My patients call me the Dr. Oz of Gaston County. This training provided the background needed to incorporate evidence-based medicine into ocular disease prevention.”

When asked what she was most proud of in her role as educator, Hoscheit pointed to her stint as

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one of four inaugural faculty members for The Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Institute. “The state-of-the-art setting not only taught students, residents and physicians the art of fitting specialty contact lenses but its primary focus was to teach clinicians to communicate.”

“Wake up every morning and be prepared to face the facts. Then develop an action plan to accomplish your goals based on those facts.”



JACK SCHAEFFER, OD
PRESIDENT/CEO & CHIEF OF OPTOMETRY
SCHAEFFER EYE CENTER
WWW.SCHAEFFEREYECENTER.COM
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Schaeffer Eye Center is one of Alabama’s largest optometric practices with 15 locations, 17 doctors and more than 100 employees. With that many moving parts, consistency could present a challenge, especially during tough economic times, but Jack Schaeffer, OD was able to ensure that his staff maintained the same business philosophy and marketing efforts during the downturn and recent recovery.

“It was important to pay a lot more attention to the

details of business as there is very little room for mistakes and wasted efficiencies,” said Schaeffer. “The upside to the economic changes is that it forces us to pay closer attention to all of the processes and more importantly to continue delivering quality eyecare to our patients. We have continued to invest in our practice on all levels despite knowing that we would not have the same return that we might have in the past.”

Schaeffer is not only president and CEO of Schaeffer Eye Center but also founder and president of the Alabama Eye Network, founder of the Contact Lens and Anterior Segment Society and co-founder and past president of the Ocular Surface Society of Optometry. He is also a frequent lecturer on topics including anterior segment disease, ocular surface disease, contact lenses and practice management.

Despite all his accomplishments, Schaeffer isn’t above accepting a little help now and then. “We have taken advantage of the many great programs offered by our vendors to educate our staff,” he added.

SUSY YU, OD, MBA, FFAO
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS STRATEGY AND
OPERATIONS SUPPORT
VISION ESSENTIALS BY KAISER PERMANENTE
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PERMANENTE
MEDICAL GROUP
WWW.KP2020.ORG
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

As director of strategy and operations support for Vision Essentials by Kaiser Permanente in Southern California, Susy Yu, OD oversees a business unit that consists of 42 locations that generated annual revenue of approximately \$160 million in 2011. Yu plays

“Integrity: do what you say. Transparency: say what you do.”



an integral role in helping to shape overall strategy, clinical workflows, purchasing, marketing, and manufacturing processes. “Vision Essentials is a small piece within a large organization,” she noted. “We compete for staff, space and resources with many other departments. However, Kaiser Permanente is an HMO, so even though they emphasize efficiency and cutting costs, Vision Essentials gets to invest in order to grow it just like a private practice would. We have the luxury of being able to take a longer range view than an organization with a smaller cash flow could.”

According to Yu, this has enabled Vision Essentials to increase its visibility through concerted marketing outreach to both internal and external audiences, demonstrating its importance to the larger organization. “In an era of tight budgets, we have been able to hire more ODs and staff, expand our manufacturing operations and open new locations,” she said.

Yu also served on the California State Board of Optometry from 2003 to 2011. She helped to craft California’s approach to glaucoma certification, deftly balancing efficiency and expanded scope with protection of the public interest. Yu is a current member of the board of directors of the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry (ARBO).

DESCRIPTION

A “teacher’s teacher” is perhaps the highest accolade that an educator can receive. And in a sense, we all are educators, serving as mentors to those younger and less experienced, as we once learned vital life lessons from mentors or our own. The following innovators have distinguished themselves either as mentors or as creative problem solvers and business builders. They have gone further, in most cases, than they foresaw at the conclusion of optometry school. They have faced the serious challenges to the survival of their profession.



“Do the best that you can for every patient, do it fast and get it right, and the world will beat a path to your door.”



BARRY FARKAS, OD, FAAO

PARTNER

DRS. FARKAS, KASSALOW, RESNICK &
ASSOCIATES

WWW.EYEWISE.COM
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

When Vistakon introduced the disposable contact lenses in 1987, they called on Barry Farkas, OD to offer clinical insights on the new product that would revolutionize the way consumers view and wear contact lenses. It wasn't a surprising choice of speakers since Farkas had been on the cutting edge of technology innovations related to CLs and other aspects of optometry all of his career—and he still is.

“I'm an opportunist and I've been fortunate to be associated with extraordinary individuals, like Donald Korb, OD, who brought out new concepts, and I was able to be involved in the embryonic stages when I could help to develop these products.” Over the course of his career, these new concepts included the first oxygen permeable contact lenses, extended wear lenses that patients could sleep in, and thin membrane soft lenses that promote oxygen transfer, hydrogel lenses for keratoconus, dry eye one-day lenses, and LipiFlo treatments for MGD deficiencies. The practice has participated in numerous FDA studies, which Farkas said provided invaluable opportunities to bring new products to market early.

Farkas, who graduated Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1971, joined a practice founded in 1958 by his uncle Paul Farkas OD and his partner, Ted

Kassalow, OD, early pioneers in contact lens fitting.

The practice philosophy is to be evolutionary, and he references other areas that the practice embraced early on, including co-managing laser vision correction patients, offering corneal refractive therapy and specializing in treating keratoconus, dry eye, glaucoma and other difficult cases. “In all areas, we strive to do the best we can,” Farkas said.

Farkas believes that the focus of his practice remains patient-based. “It is important to have new products, but you always need to remember that the patient in your chair is the reason you are there.”

“For an optometrist, there is nothing more fun or profitable today than offering Ortho K.”



HAL OSTROM, OD

FOUNDER

CLINTON EYE ASSOCIATES
WWW.CLINTONEYE.COM
CLINTON, CONNECTICUT

Hal Ostrom, OD considers himself a lucky man to have found his calling within optometry—as a specialist in performing Ortho K, the reshaping of the cornea with the overnight use of rigid contact lenses.

“I see a lot of kids, and very typically I'll have a pre-teen or teenager come in who, when I began working with him, was a -3.0D myope,” he explained. “I can see a change in how outgoing they are, how they have changed their look or their demeanor, and in how much they enjoy the freedom of seeing well and having nothing in their eyes all day.”

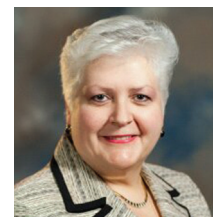
About 70 percent of Ostrom's practice is related to Ortho K, contact lenses and medical model optometry; and the remainder comes from eyeglasses. His

practice, which is located in an 18th century New England home, soon will move to larger quarters. He recently hired an optician and is expanding his dispensary to make that a 50/50 revenue mix.

Ostrom's specialty contact lens work has grown, largely from word of mouth and referrals from colleagues. A 1984 graduate of New England College of Optometry, he continues to educate himself on contact lenses and corneal reshaping techniques. He was the first in his state to become a fellow in the Orthokeratology Academy of America, in 2006. He is certified by a number of contact lens manufacturers in providing Corneal Refractive Therapy, a process similar to Ortho K that utilizes various reverse geometry designs in rigid contact lenses. His website also describes his methods as Gentle Vision Shaping (GVS), a more consumer-friendly description.

In evaluating a candidate for Ortho K or GVS, Ostrom provides a free consultation, which takes about an hour. A lot of that time is spent answering patient questions and taking corneal topographies. Still, his best marketing tool is his satisfied patients. “People who have undergone a dramatic change in vision tend to talk to other people about it,” he said.

“Our motto is, ‘The Visible Difference,’ and we try to fulfill that for each patient we treat.”



MADELINE L. ROMEU, OD, FAAO

FOUNDER

DR. ROMEU EYE ASSOCIATES
WWW.DRROMEU.COM
WEST NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY

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Many optometrists specialize in fitting contact lenses, but few have the knowledge and experience of Madeline Romeu, OD who specializes in hard to fit patients at her practice in West New York, N.J., near New York City.

“Whether a patient has keratoconus, post-lasik or has irregular corneas or transplants, I can always improve their vision,” said Romeu, who received the Bausch + Lomb Contact Lens Excellence Award upon graduating from the State University of New York (SUNY), College of Optometry in

1976. Taking a position as an assistant clinical professor in the college’s contact lens department, she taught interns from 1976 to 1996, serving as chief of contact lens service for the last two years. Romeu has also taught students in her New Jersey practice as a preceptor for students from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry and an affiliated professor with Inter-American University College of Optometry in Puerto Rico.

In private practice since 1976, Romeu offers a full scope of services including eye exams, medical treatment of disease, low vision and dispensing. She is

also a sought-after consultant who advises contact lens, optical and pharmaceutical companies.

“My association with Transitions Optical since 2003 has been especially significant,” she noted. “It involves various initiatives with respect to UV protection, children’s vision and eye health issues for Hispanic and other ethnic groups.”

Romeu also serves chairperson of the AOA subcommittee on diversity communications. She has lectured extensively nationally and internationally and been interviewed frequently in Spanish and English TV, radio and print media.

DESCRIPTION

Dispensing contact lenses has long been an integral part of a thriving optometric practice. In the age of disposable lenses and online optical retailing, however, many eyecare professionals have turned away from trying to compete with low-cost vendors. Not so for this selection of innovators. They have found ways to distinguish their practices by specializing in contact lens dispensing. They often are the problem solvers, where others have failed, and they change lives positively. They have succeeded by offering their patients specialized, optometric services.



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square feet. “This expansion was a huge accomplishment for me since I designed the optical,” said Happ. “Not too many practices have trees on the inside!” The enhanced optical also features park benches and a fountain.

In addition to the creative revamp of the optical shop, the practice has kept pace with a fluctuating economy by offering free frames with second- and third-pair purchases, increasing the number of value frames for sale and re-evaluating practice insurance coverage. The practice, which hired an

outside marketing firm, uses social networking to get the word out, including a presence on Facebook, Twitter and staff blogging. Quality employees are crucial, the doctor stressed. “The upside of this poor economy is that we have decided to hold off on big purchases, but have been investing in staff training,” she said. “Staff members love the education, and we get empowered, loyal staff.”

Happ also gives back, including a memorable charitable mission to Guatemala. “I was only giving out reading glasses, but this one woman explained through tears what they meant to her,” Happ said.

“Her only source of income for her family was her sewing. She had not been able to do her craft since her vision had failed. Those small readers gave her more than her eyesight back.”

Happ also is proud of the practice’s embrace of technology and the latest optometric science and treatments. “We have the TearLab, Epic Refracting System, Visi Office, and the iZon System, and offer eye lash extensions, Botox, Latisse and Blepharoplastys.” The practice also offers nutraceuticals such as Omega 3 and MacuHealth supplements. ■

DESCRIPTION

Dispensing eyewear is becoming a more dynamic, immersive and even fun experience for patients. New technologies such as digital dispensing systems that take personalized patient measurements and allow patients to capture images of themselves modeling various frames have introduced a greater level of interactivity into the dispensary. Even something simple like letting patients play with an iPad or offering them a fresh cup of coffee while they’re waiting to see the doctor can make a big difference. The Optical Dispensing Innovators profiled here share some of the secrets to their success.